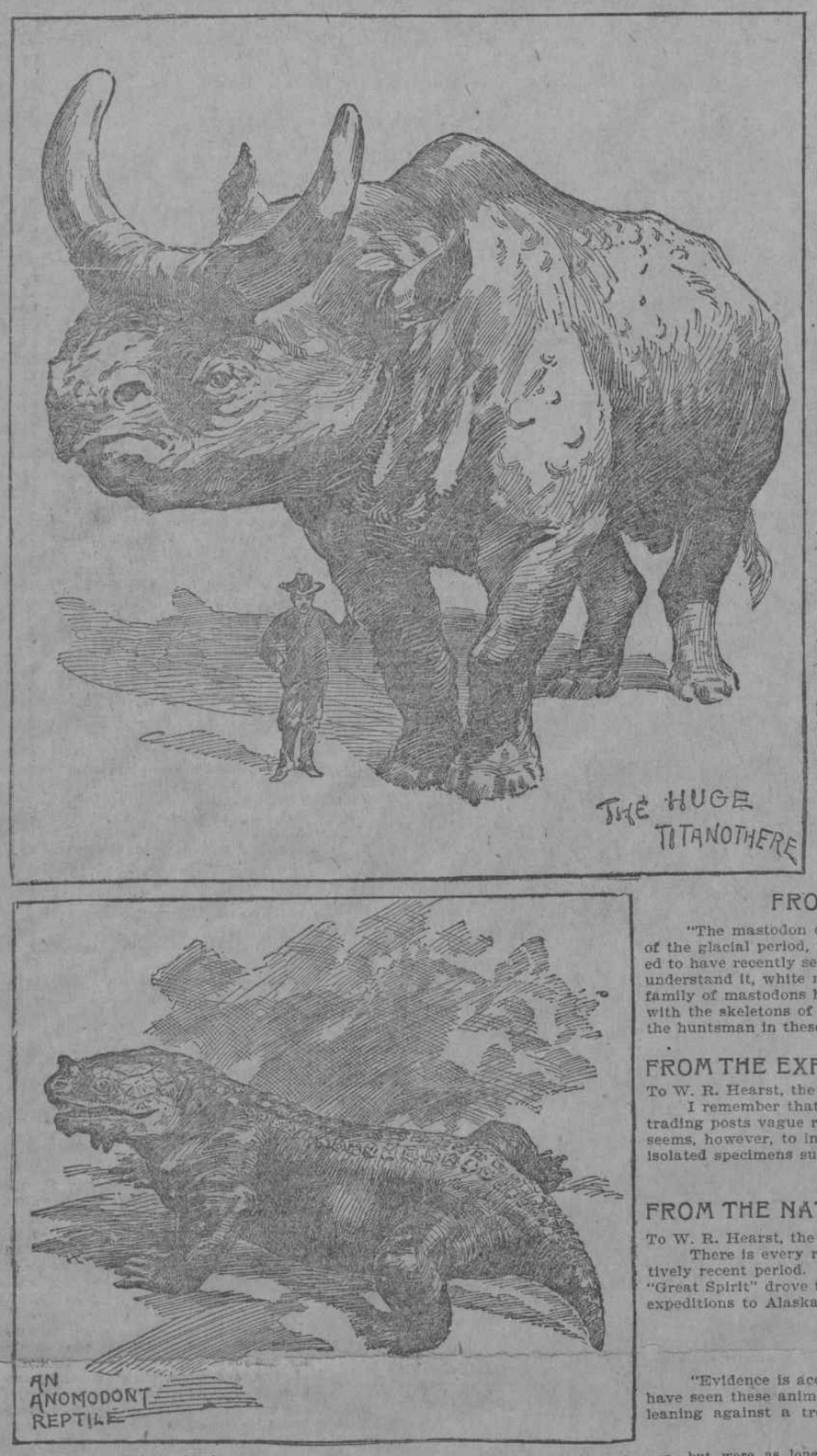
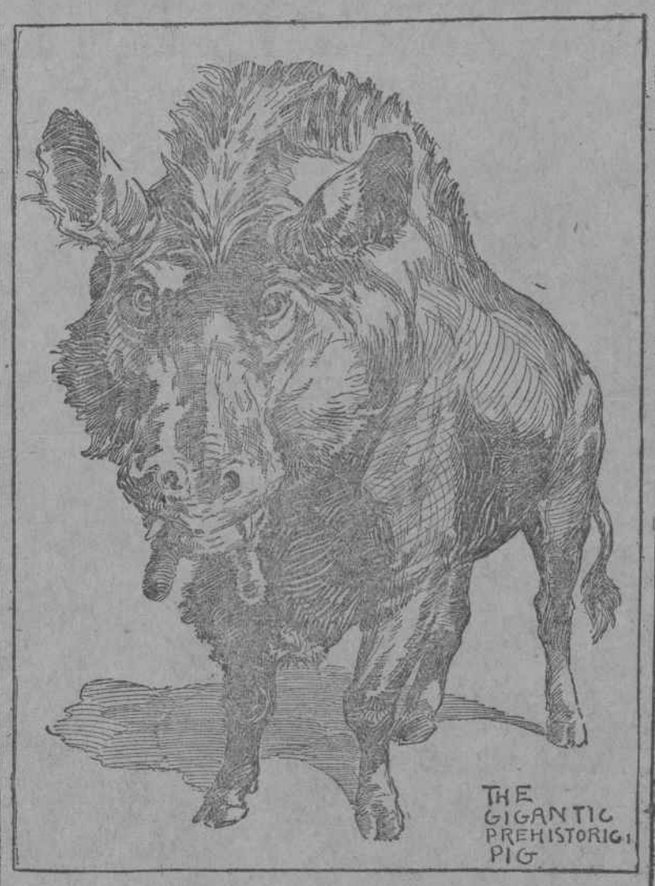
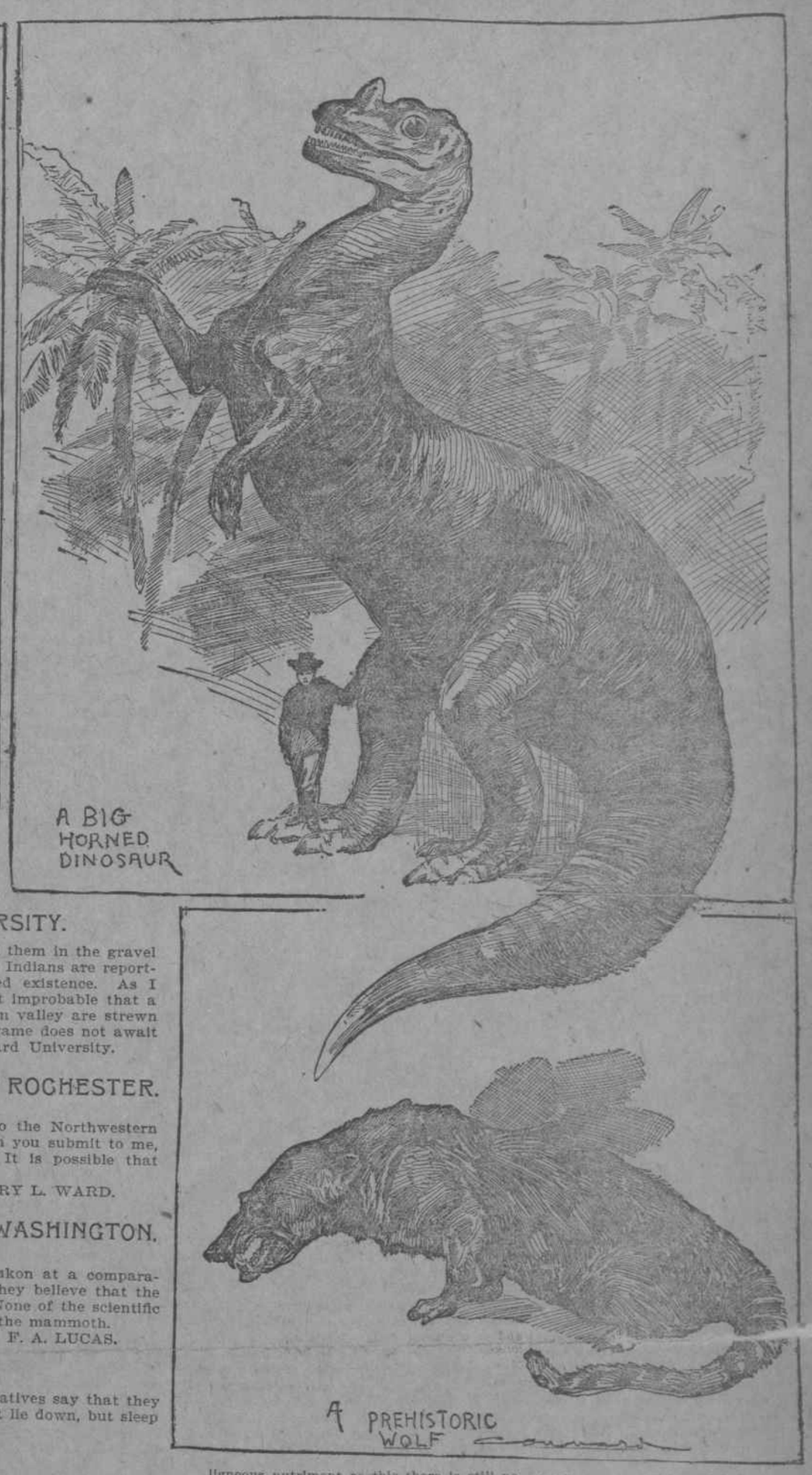
ARE THE HUGE MAMMOTHS STILL ROAMING OVER THE WILDS OF ALASKA?







WHAT OUR EMINENT PALEONTOLOGISTS SAY.

FROM PROF. F. W. PUTNAM, OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

"The mastodon did not become extinct until after man appeared on the earth. We find them in the gravel of the glacial period, which proves that they existed comparatively lately. The region where Indians are reported to have recently seen traces of a mastodon, or mammoth, is very favorable for prolonged existence. As I understand it, white men have never penetrated there, and Indians very rarely, and it is not improbable that a family of mastodons has survived until the present. The forests and mountains of the Yukon valley are strewn with the skeletons of these enormous creatures, and who shall say, therefore, that gigantic game does not await the huntsman in these wilds?"

F. W. PUTNAM, Harvard University.

FROM THE EXPERT OF THE NATURAL SCIENCE INSTITUTE AT ROCHESTER.

To W. R. Hearst, the Journal:

I remember that on two or three occasions hunting parties of natives have brought to the Northwestern trading posts vague reports that they had seen mammoths. The account from Alaska, which you submit to me, seems, however, to indicate more recent observation and more immediate communication. It is possible that isolated specimens survive in parts of the country as yet unexplored.

HENRY L. WARD.

FROM THE NATURALIST OF THE U. S. NATIONAL MUSEUM AT WASHINGTON.

To W. R. Hearst, the Journal:

There is every reason to believe that the proboscideans inhabited the valley of the Yukon at a comparatively recent period. The Indians speak of the species as "the father of the buffalo," and they believe that the "Great Spirit" drove the savage monsters in order to save smaller game from destruction. None of the scientific expeditions to Alaska has, however, as yet reported any trace of the continued presence of the mammoth.

F. A. LUCAS.

FROM THE AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN.

"Evidence is accumulating that the mammoth existed up to quite a recent date. The natives say that they have seen these animals, and that they feed on the boughs of a species of fir tree and do not lie down, but sleep leaning against a tree."—Editorial in the American Antiquarian, vol. IX.

THERE comes from Alaska the amazing report that a living mammoth was seen and pursued by a party of native hunters in the White River basin, only a few weeks ago.

The American giant elephant, or mammoth, is associated, in the minds of the most unscientific men, with flying dragons and the monstrous saurians which became extinct thousands of years before the human race existed; but the mammoth, prodigious a brute as he is, is, geologically speaking, a contemporary of ours; and inquiry among expert paleontologists shows it to be quite possible that isolated specimens of "Elephas primigenus" still survive in the remote valleys of the Northwest.

The hunting tribe of the White River, consisting of only about sixty men, is a strange mixture of native races. The "Stick," or Tahk-heesh, Indians, were driven down toward the coast by the Chilcat tribe, and in turn beaten back to the mountains by their inability to cope with the Tulinkeets, who inhabit the coast and highlands from Mt. St. Elias to the River Nass, and who are the most skilful boatmen and seal hunters of all the native races. In the course of their tribal wars and intervals of peaceful trading, these three nations developed a mixed band of hunters, equally at home on the ice floes of the coast, the rapids of the Yukon tributaries and the glaciers over which the mountain goats make their way to the remote valleys of the interior. Living for the most part on the flesh of the black bear and caribou, they occasionally come down to the Sound for seal, and the three oomiaks, in which they descend the Yukon, are always welcomed by the traders at Fort Selkirk, who are eager to buy the chosen pelts and broad antlers with which the boats are loaded.

These traders always ask the natives for news of fossils, and from time to time succeed in obtaining large tusks, which are sold to museums for high prices, and the traders have sometimes heard stories of the pursuit of a living mammoth, but until now all of these tales were said by the narrators to be traditions handed down by their forefathers. The hunters themselves are a very simple, practical people, busily engaged in earning a livelihood, not at all disposed to waste much time over their legends, and not at all given to romancing about their adventures, which seem to them as prosaic as a bricklayer's task.

Carter, the Canadian fur buyer, who has opened a new trading post on the bank of the Yukon just below the mouth of the White River, was the first white man who heard this story of the living mammoth seen this Fall on the shore of Sand Lake. The boat's crew described the beast as "oonuevak mahutzuh," or fiercely active, and at first the trader thought they had seen a remarkably large bear. But when they described the "waving stove-pipe," or "hkilityet," at its head, and corroborated one another in stating that the creature had thrown water over its back from this large tube, Carter questioned them more closely. They said they had at first been afraid to approach the beast, which was standing with its forelegs in the water, and that, when it had turned away, they had beached their boat where it had stood and made notches on the boat frame corresponding to the diameter of the footprint. The tusks, they said, were not as large as the better run of fossil specimens they had seen, but were as long as their icehook which measured ten feet. Carter's account of the matter is that up to this point he believed the story, but when the hunters went on describing the beast as having a heavy coat of wool, which hung from its throat and belly until it almost touched the ground, he lost faith, because the pictures of mammoths that he had seen showed the creature to be without hair. As a matter of fact, the mammoths which have been found encased in ice in a perfect state of preservation in Siberia and Labrador had a mat of coarse hair, such as the hunters described, and Carter was probably misled by some pictures of a reconstructed mastodon, a different species altogether. This padding was the defence of the beast from attack from beneath, and the combination of bristles and coarse wool afforded an absolute protection against the ripping horn of an enemy, like the rhinoceros, or against any amphibious reptile which might try to eviscerate the monster standing in the water.

When Carter talked the matter over with the traders at Fort Selkirk, and they in turn learned from Sitka that if the story were true the find was a valuable one, he tried to find out whether it would be possible to take the creature alive. The difficulties of transportation are, however, so great that even if the hunters succeeded in getting the mammoth into a pitfall there is not the slightest possibility of its being brought to the coast in captivity. And as the flesh of frozen mammoths has not only been handled, but has actually been eaten, within the last few years, there will be nothing very new in the exhibition of the remains of a slaughtered specimen.

As a subject for scientific discussion, the reported discovery at the head waters of the White River is certainly of the greatest possible interest. It will be seen from the opinions and observations collected on this page that experts agree that the mammoth inhabited the Northwest at a comparatively recent period. That this monster, more huge, than the largest elephant and more ferocious than a rhinoceros, has not yet been completely extirpated is a startling possibility.

The men who know most about the mammoth are the few savants who have either worked in Alaska or handled the remains collected by the various expeditions. Most paleontologists (or fossil students) concern themselves with the minute forms of the lower organisms revealed by a microscopic examination of the older geological strata rather than with the rare remains of the great mammalia. And it is only incidentally that the literature of the subject affords any definite information as to the habits of the American behemoth.

Professor Nathaniel Shaler, who occupies the chair of geology at Harvard, has, however, given much attention to this especial branch of science, and has presented a number of communications to the various learned societies.

William Healey Dall, paleontologist of the United States Geological Survey Office at Washington, is qualified by his ten years' travel in Alaska, as well as by his long experience as curator of the United States National Museum at Washington, to speak with authority. His book, "Alaska and Its Resources," is a standard work, and his many communications to the learned societies of this country carry the greatest weight. He has collected more remains of the elephas primigenius than any other living savant.

Professor John Collett, of Indianapolis, long the chief of the Indiana State Bureau of Geology, is another student whose researches are of great importance, and to him, probably, belongs the distinction of having found the most recent remains ever unearthed.

Lieutenant Frederick Schwatka, whose "Military Reconnoissance in Alaska" gave the first published information about the Yukon Valley, is another trained observer whose views command respect.

In the official reports and other writings of these various authorities there are to be found no accounts of living mammoths, and most of the remains discovered have either consisted of bones entirely, or were so firmly imbedded in ice that their state of preservation gave no indication of the time of the specimens' death.

Professor Collett, however, records in the American Antiquarian the finding of remains not frozen, in which the marrow of the bones was still so soft that the surveying party used it to grease their boots. This seems clearly to indicate that the mammoth survived in our own time.

Professor Shaler points out with great force in one of his contributions to the American Naturalist that the climatic changes which have taken place in the Northwest were not such as to lead to the extinction of the mammoth. The mixed sheathing of bristles and hair and greasy matted wool which formed the outer coat of his integument combined with the tremendous thickness of his hide to render the mammoth proof against the utmost rigors of the North. The stomachs of the specimens which have been found in the ice contained masses of young fir cones, fir spikes and pine shoots, and of such rude ligneous nutriment as this there is still no lack on the edge of the tundra. Sand Lake, at the head of White River, lies upon the extreme boundary of the country in which caribou find grazing ground, and if there are in the more remote valleys some few mammoths still to be found, their presence could only be known if one of their excursions over the dividing hills happened to coincide with one of the rare visits of a hunting tribe to this part of the country. The coast of Southern Alaska has been surveyed and described with great exactitude, and the immediate vicinity of Mount St. Elias has been minutely described by expeditions which have travelled about its base. Between this line and the source of the White River there lies, however, an expanse of territory which will not attract the general attention of hunters and trappers until the Yukon country has been exhausted.

The abundant growth of berries, described by Lieutenant Schwatka as attracting both caribou and black bear at the mouth of the White River, is not found after the first day's journey up that stream, and there seems to be no doubt that the handful of native hunters who occasionally push their way further are the only people who know anything about the more remote valleys.

ON CATCHING HEAT.

That Is a More Correct Expression, Say the Doctors, Than Catching Cold.

Some doctors hold that there is more danger from going from the cold outside and into a hot room than from the hot air into the cold. It is declared that it is advisable to get well heated before going out into the cold. It is further declared that it would be more correct in most cases to speak of "catching heat" than of "catching cold."

Dr. William H. Pearse, writing in the Scalpel for September, says that he ventures to differ from the popular belief that there is special danger in going from a hot room into the open air, holding, on the contrary, that the heat of the room or house is a great preservative from chill or "catching cold" on going out into the open air.

In Russia, in Central Europe, Canada and the Northern United States, houses are made very warm with a dry heat in the Winter, yet men, women and children go out into a temperature below zero. The stimulation and heightened condition of the circulation and nerves, and ultimate molecules of protoplasm, give a great power of resistance to the outer intense cold, preventing "chill" in the first exposure until exercise with its infinite motions, as it were, takes up and maintains the conditions of resistance.

Dr. Pearse says that he has walked at midnight from a highly heated mansion across Boston Common, in his dress coat only, on a calm, starry night, the temperature about zero. He suffered no inconvenience and felt sure that the stimulus of the heat of the house gave him power of resistance to the cold.

The Medical Record declares that Dr. Pearse is undoubtedly correct in his observation that one can come from a hot room into the cold outer air and run but little chance of catching cold. The danger is rather in entering a hot room from without, especially an unventilated hot room.

Would See on His Journey Over the New Trans-Siberian Railway Route.

The best possible connections to-day, which, as a rule, cannot be made, will enable a traveller to go around the world in seventy-one days. The average time is about one-third more. The routes vary, but the shortest cut would be this: New York to Southampton; Southampton to Brindisi via Suez Canal, Red Sea, etc., to Yokohama; Yokohama to San Francisco by steamer and thence by rail over the American continent, in seventy-one days.

To accomplish the trip in thirty days over the trans-Siberian route, the itinerary would be as follows: New York to Bremen, 7 days; Bremen to St. Petersburg, 1½ days; St. Petersburg to Vladivostock, 8½ days; Vladivostock to San Francisco, 9 days; San Francisco to New York, 4 days. Total, 30 days.

To make this trip, say in November, 1900, the globe girdler would board an American liner and on the seventh day wake up in Germany. Rural Germany and the beautiful castled Rhine would greet him on the first section of the overland European trip. Then, as his course veered to the northward toward St. Petersburg, he would pass under the shelter of snow-clad hills, and the country all about him would be typical of Winter, with here and there a little village peopled with Russian peasants in their queer fur garments, until the noble spires of the palace and cathedrals of the Russian capital were in sight.

And then on from St. Petersburg across the bleak Siberian steppes, mile after mile without a sign of life, and the sky meeting the earth on all sides. At times the traveller would see a band of peasants riding along on sledges drawn by dogs or in the queer Russian sleighs. An occasional black spot on the great ice plain would tell of a coal mine where political prisoners were working out the expiation of their crimes. As the train sped along it would doubtless pass several gangs of men chained together, with an officer of the Czar, whip in hand, towering over the starved wretches, urging them to the last remaining pound of energy in their emaciated bodies.

Then for countless miles the scene would be an unvarying one, the monotony only relieved by an occasional convict settlement. Gradually as the course turned to the south, toward the northern frontier of China, the scene would change until the surroundings would tell that the train had arrived in the neighborhood of the land of Li Hung Chang.

A few hours more and the seacoast would be reached, and the traveller would look out on the noble harbor of Vladivostock, with Japan to the south. The trip from there to America would be on board the new steamers that would run direct either to Vancouver or San Francisco.

In all the civilized countries of the world there is a standard gauge for tracks for railways which has in nearly every instance been adopted, but the Russian prince does not intend to take any chances, and has established a gauge several inches wider than other European nations, so that in case of war they cannot switch their engines and cars on to his tracks and thus convey troops to the interior.